



# Canine Back Pain

When evaluating your dogs back pain there are a lot of factors to consider: age, fitness, collar and harness fit, your dog's posture, your posture when the dog works beside you, your dogs posture on the treadmill or exercise devices used, your dog's muscle tone, and even the type of work your dog is doing.

Back pain can be a bit of a vicious circle, when your dog's back is sore, he/she doesn't want to engage it, so it loses muscle and becomes weaker; when weaker, your dog fatigues faster and won't stay engaged and round, if they won't stay round they will invert resulting in a dropped back, and their back soreness is amplified.

The first thing with back pain is to watch for fatigue. A dog with a sore back needs a lot of breaks. These breaks can vary in their length but they will need to be placed well to allow the dog to drain wastes from the already compromised tissue. Your job as the handler will be to keep an excellent connection with your dog in order to decide if the tissue requires a break time, and appropriate duration.

Try to avoid the dog being harnessed to anything and having to pull weight at this time.

Minimize exercise where the back is taking impact, like jumping, stairs, fly ball or other impact sports, or high collection etc. Impact exercises will all be added back incrementally as the back heals and rebuilds strength.

### Tips for working with back pain:

- Application of heat (can be used before and after work). Use 12-18 min of heat before the dog is worked.
- Therapy products that increase circulation.
- Light to moderate massage using your hand or if the dog allows it a massage mitt to increase circulation and stimulate nerves.
- Try not to give more than 2 days off in

a row (unless instructed by a member of your canine wellness team). Tissue building is best done with a very consistent program.

### Exercises:

Hand walk your dog to warm up and to cool down. This allows the tissue to gain circulation and muscle exchange without excess stress. Cool down times are often too short and a dog with back issues will need 15 min hand walk to clear wastes.

### In-hand work:

Depending on the severity of soreness, work may be limited to large figures and straight lines. As the dog's pain eases smaller figures and more engagement can be added. This stage should be asked for as quickly as the dog can tolerate, as without it there will be a limited increase in the level of tone. The level of work will depend on what we have found with your dog today.

- Flexion work; serpentine, spirals, figure eights.
- Lateral work; leg yield or side pass.
- Transitions; both up and down as well as within the gate. As your dog strengthens, their body will benefit from transitions that span a gate.
- Poles
- Cavaletti
- Turn on forehand and turn on haunches
- Labyrinth
- Hill work, up hills, down hills (low grade only - it may put too much strain on dog if the grade is too great) and side-hill work.
- Backing; both in a straight line and on a circle
- Zig zag laterals
- Footing change

### Range of motion exercises:

Performed before and after work, as well as safe for the dog that has been taken out of work altogether if cleared by a Veterinarian and body worker.

- Neck/Rib Rock

- Rib/Hip Rock
- Tail Rock
- Quick Tail Pull
- Tummy Tucks
- Foreleg Lifted Rock Back
- Foreleg Sternal Lift
- Wither Rock
- Sternal Wither Rock

### Stretches (performed after work):

- Tummy Tucks
- A-E Cookie Stretches
- Barrel stretches
- Hip/Rib Rocking
- Neck/Rib Rock
- Wither Rock
- Hip Tuck
- Lateral Hindend Tuck
- Psoas Stretches
- Tire Stand
- Sternal Wither Rock

Feeling rushed? Do you need to get on the fast track to getting your dogs' fitness InHand?

I know how busy life can be, and I know we all want to do the best we can for our dog. If you don't have the time to do the complete program listed above with your dog, it's better to do a little work rather than skip it all. Choose one exercise a day from the exercises, range of motion and stretch list above. Even if you rotate through the above list of work on a daily basis, you will be making a positive change and helping your animal. Choose to do something every day, no matter how small will be a step forward in your dogs wellness program. When we work our dog in the peak and valley type of program with a ton of work for a few days and then nothing for a time, that we may actually be doing more harm than good.

Steady work towards your dogs postural goals will bring the results you want, and the more time you can devote the quicker you will get there, however slow and steady will win the race as well.

**\*\*NOTE: Therapy is not a replacement for Veterinary Care.\*\***

